

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank France for organizing today's debate on an issue on which, as has already been said, much remains to be done. We also grateful for the participation of and statements by Chef de Cabinet Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti; Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN-Women; Ms. Charo Mina-Rojas, of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security; and Ms. Michaëlle Jean, Secretary General of the International Organization of La Francophonie

The women and peace and security agenda will require our persistent attention if it is to achieve real and tangible progress. In that regard, we would like to highlight the periodic work of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security, and we align ourselves with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Canada on its behalf. We would also like to highlight the efforts of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security, which helps to maintain a systematic approach to the subject on the Security Council's agenda. We particularly appreciate the momentum generated by the Secretary-General for the effective implementation of the women and peace and security agenda.

Uruguay welcomes other initiatives that are helping to achieve the agenda's objectives, such as that of Spain in establishing a network of national focal points for women and peace and security, as well as the efforts of the team of experts from the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict to strengthen national capacities for investigating and prosecuting crimes and protecting victims and witnesses. Gender equality and the empowerment of women are essential conditions for conflict prevention and peacekeeping and key factors in achieving the goals set by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Let us be clear. In Uruguay, when we talk about the empowerment of women, we are talking about creating and ensuring the conditions that women need to exercise their most basic rights to full, individual freedom, without the artificial constraints that relegate them to second-class status. That means the freedom to choose their way of life; to choose how, where and with whom to live their life; and to make decisions for themselves and by themselves on their education, their work and their bodies. In short, we are talking about the freedom to be masters of their own destiny. An empowered woman is a vital instrument for transforming our societies' egalitarian development.

It is the responsibility of States to safeguard women's rights and ensure gender equality, as well as the inclusion and non-discriminatory treatment of women regardless of race, religion, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or any other status. However, it is also the responsibility of organized civil society to be vigilant about their countries' conduct in that regard. States should also work to improve women's participation in mediating, preventing and resolving conflicts, as outlined in resolution 1325 (2000). They have a proven ability to approach, negotiate, understand and empathize in such situations.

Uruguay can attest to all of that. The increase in the numbers of female personnel in the peacekeeping operations in which our country participates, which today is still only a modest 7 per cent of the total, has nevertheless been an enriching element for the quality of the contingent and the results obtained. In particular, in missions such as the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we can attest to the effective role that women have played in building trust in local communities for all the reasons I just mentioned, and even more so among those who have been victims of any kind of sexual violence.

Regrettably, the horrors of gender-based sexual violence continue to constitute one of the most devastating effects of armed conflict around the world. We must take effective measures to eradicate that scourge, but we must also put an end to impunity and restore the dignity of the victims of such crimes. In that regard, we have to rethink our collective approach in order to focus on the victims and survivors, who should receive comprehensive assistance that can ensure that they are able to fully recover from such violations and reintegrate into their societies.

States should maximize their efforts on both the national and international levels to ensure that the perpetrators of these crimes are prosecuted. The International Criminal Court plays a key role in that regard by judging crimes that have been recognized by the Rome Statute as war crimes and crimes against humanity, including those that may constitute crimes of genocide. Consequently, it is the responsibility of the Security Council to ensure that crimes of sexual violence are referred to the Court and that such cases are continuously monitored.

Similarly, we must ensure that United Nations peacekeepers are not part of the problem. In that connection, we welcome recent initiatives by the Secretary-General such as the proposal of a voluntary pact with troop-contributing countries against sexual exploitation and abuse, to which Uruguay has adhered; the establishment of a women's leadership circle, of which Uruguay is honoured to be a member; and the appointment of an advocate for the rights of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Uruguay stresses the importance of carefully educating personnel involved in peace missions in relation to issues of gender and sexual violence in conflicts. In the specific case of my country, prior to deployment, all personnel must undergo a training course on human rights, international humanitarian law, gender issues, child protection and sexual abuse and exploitation, as well as sign a statement in which they agree to comply with the standards of conduct.

The gender perspective must be part of the entire peacekeeping planning process, as well as at the time of review and when it comes to reducing the number of deployed personnel. On this point, the recent cuts to the gender and human rights components of various mandates of certain peace missions are of concern.

We welcome the fact that, since 2000, the agenda on women and peace and security has acquired considerable normative momentum. We also highlight the work done by the bodies

established under various human rights instruments with regard to the agenda in their oversight role. I would like to reiterate the need to join forces in order to implement transformative and large-scale initiatives that will ensure that issues related to the women and peace and security agenda are systematically integrated in approaches to prevention and peacekeeping.

Uruguay reaffirms its commitment to the agenda on women and peace and security and to continue working with the United Nations and all Member States for its full and effective implementation.